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QUANTUM SOCIAL CLASS: DIOGENES' SEARCH FOR "THAT THIRD OTHER THING"

NONPOLITICS BIOPOLITICS, DIOGENES, MARXISM, PRECARITY, QUANTUM SOCIOLOGY, SOCRATES

Class, for the longest time, has been conceived as inseparable from the idea of civilisation, that somehow society always gravitates towards a social stratification process that privileges some members of society over others. In many cases, as a civilisation emerges, this stratification process has operated around family names, positions held in previous formulations of civility, or such things as proximity to location, or privileged knowledge. If, as a crude example, you are the

only one in the village who knows how to fish, the fisherman becomes the one who sits at the source with power over the distribution of that resource, and slowly this orientation *can* be entrenched over time. Something even such as physical size can drive the formation of social strata in an emerging society, once again ultimately manifesting as privileged access or restrictions to resources, experiences, and so on. The result is similar in any case, the population is divided along social, geographical or biopolitical lines. This is one of the key myths identified in David Wengrow and David Graeber's text about Capitalism, that class necessary or naturally occurs as a part of cities and civilisation. Yet, despite seemingly like an outdated concept, we actively engage with the idea regularly. It becomes necessary to talk about class again precisely because our traditional way of conceptualising class is becoming very unhelpful in grasping the essence of society around us. Traditional ways of understanding class (in the Marxist sense) get reduced to certain dualistic (or dialectical) Images like "Bourgeois & Proletariate", or "Upper Class & Lower Class", or "the ruling class and their subjects", or "the capitalist class (owners of the means of production) and the working class (operators of the means of production)"; "exploiter & exploited". It is arguable that our tendency to see class as binary is a problem specific to the Western philosophical tradition (see Derrida "Metaphysics of Presence"), and that perhaps it was never so simple as to divide society into clear classes. Nonetheless, it is probable that the illusion of binary class divisions were affirmed by a deliberate attempt from the State to make it seem like this was the case. Furthermore, it is probable that, before many of the changes that Capitalism would embrace in the 21st Century, there was more of a sense of class unity, as in, there was some shared position in relation to power held by large groups of people. Yet, we are not in the Capital of Hegel and Marx anymore, and even if Capital was never as Hegel and Marx saw it, we do not see it that way anymore.

Perhaps Capital was once more simple, and now it is extremely complex, with Capitalism in the 1600s being but a lizard brain that will one day be superseded by emergent cortexes and other complex systems. It grew, it developed new organs, it built new distribution systems, it developed and implemented new control systems. It's a different animal entirely now, with genetic traces in Marx's Capital but it has extra teeth, a bigger brain, and a supercharged libido. Things have shifted to a point where it is very difficult for any two people to really say they share an identity in terms of relative positioning in relation to power.

Perhaps one trace of this could be seen with the emergence of the "middle class", in countries like the United Kingdom – no one has ever been sure what the Middle Class is, but nonetheless the idea has served its purpose well, becoming nothing but a blank signifier that can be used tactically to derail socioeconomic analysis. There is/was no middle class because there was no set of definitions upon which one could define who was in and who wasn't in the social group, there was no set of shared privileges or limitations that defined that someone was Middle class. It was a term used by the working class clerks to seem less 'filthy' (in the sense of chimney sweeps and so on), and a term used by the upper class to seem less bourgeois. Yet, at the same time, it was a sincere attempt to describe a new social phenomenon of the class-less, at a time when it would have been difficult to accept or conceive of a society without class. Often the term middle class would conceptually fill a hole in Marxist analyses of class left by the emerging

reality of "precarity". Capitalist society was becoming so complex that limitations and accesses could be distributed in incredibly complex ways, which was creating a situation where the specific privileges and limitations each individual has is different to everyone standing next to them. Instead of large groups sharing common goals, identifying with each other through shared oppressions, each individual began having such different or unique problems due to the unique privileges or limitations placed upon them, that no one can truly relate to each other anymore, and the specific forces which compound or bind class groups evaporate.

Precarity is a useful term for this, coined by Isabel Lorey. In their analysis of neoliberalism, Lorey uses the term precarity to refer to a kind of economic isolationism that reaches the individual level. Where hyper individualisation may refer to some kind of cultural orientation, where culturally people behave extremely individualistically and perceive themselves as individual units isolated from each other, precarity more refers to the economic-identity/reality of each individual, and how their access to resources and so on, is determined by the varying values that comprise their individual identity.

Hyperindividualisation, as it is called, is the result of taking the ideas of Sovereign Individualism to an extreme, treating each individual as a political state of their own, and dragging every aspect of social, political and economic life into orbit around individualism. As disciplinary societies turn into societies of control, the collective subjugations that give rise to class dissipate and leave in place something quite terrifying. Each individual is their own class bracket now, distributed across multidimensional privileges and accesses. It can be as simple as access to watching certain TV shows in your country's Netflix, to whether you are granted access to certain medical procedures, or access to certain civil rights, or access to societal participation, access to Instagram, anything. Using maze-like algorithms, Capital can create a unique identity for you that makes you as unable to relate to anyone else as possible, it can create entirely unique circumstances that have the effect of dissolving class identity.

It is easy to see this play out in society, and it seems highly likely that our ability to offer intersectional critique of someone's privilege is actually so spot on that it seems like a weapon we are all afraid to use. For example, it is common for someone to make great critiques of some distant foreign foe, but there seems to be no healthy way of turning the same critique back at our own communities. The issue of accountability is a hot topic these days, because if you turn the critique to your own group, it can seem to create a feeling of disunity in the group, as if no one is safe from some kind of divisive critique. This is obviously not the desired outcome but nonetheless it creates very different critical conditions for the interior and the exterior, those outside of the bounds being held to different standards. The central idea that we are all equal is undeniably attractive, conceptually, but it conceals an important truth from the Deleuzian side of philosophy: we are not all the same, contrarily, we are all absolutely different in the maximum that different can be. In terms of difference and repetition, no repetition is the same, repetition and mutation nurtures difference in the absolute sense. It is a common idea, to pit concepts like equality against equity; should a fair government distribute equal resources or should it use some kind of algorithm to distribute resources based on needs. If some people already have a lot

of food and wealth, and other have none, should the State's resources or influence go towards giving the poor more than the rich? Or should all "payouts" be identical.

To bring this back to the starting point, the old Image of distinct social classes may have made sense when the Thought Image was "Newtonian" or "Classical", but with the Quantum Thought Image, class disintegrate as each individual becomes something indeterminable, it is impossible to determine one's position in society at any given moment, much like the position of the electron, we can but predict where we might be, "somewhere .. here-ish". We might group together into various temporal arrangements but soon disperse again. The atom is a great example, because in the classical sense an atom was considered the smaller piece of matter (indivisible), and we see this metaphor pervade old school social theory because we would treat humans as atomic, as individual – the smallest indivisible part of a social formation, but now we have departed from such an Image. In the era of Quantum Deleuzian Class, we are as divisible as an atom is, which when inspected, is an assemblage that is defined by the specific assembly of parts and not due to any defining characteristic of the unassembled *parts*. Following this, Deleuze introduces the concept of the *dividual*, as in, dividable part of a social group, because we are, in the eyes of societal machinery, many different, fractured identities. To the capitalist machine, we are social security numbers, tax numbers, medical numbers, insurance numbers, we are categorisable consumers, we are hypothetical potential audience members, and so on, we are both seen and treated as if we are multiple different things at once, with different machines "talking to us" as if we are a multiplicity of identities rather than a single unified unit. When the cable company calls, it can almost feel like you have to call another person inside your head to come to the front and deal with it.

What emerges from within all of this is another moment where sociology needs to merge with the quantum thought image. In this case it is argued that with the rise of both Quantum sciences and Non-Philosophy, the fundamental image has become that nothing is stable, especially identity. One result of this is to stop seeing the human as an individual, there is no isolated subject due to us being entangled – we are entangled with fellow humans, we are entangled with the movement of water around our ecosystems as rain and rivers, we are entangled with geopolitical machinery, we are entangled with black holes millions of years away, we are entangled with crises that happened millions of years ago.

The argument is that through hyper individualisation, every individual's economic stress is so unique and personalised that we become trapped in our own customised nightmare, and ultimately become alienated/ostracised as a consequence. We can then argue that through alienation, the usual class dynamics described by Marx can't emerge, no sense of unified class can take hold and bind people together. Quantum class then, would be a take on class where each *dividual* is either to be considered as being in a class of their own, a class defined by the precise custom configurations of the *dividual* within the control society (the control society defines each person's social status through the specific accesses it grants to them), OR, class has to be seen as a convulsing and temporal field that each *dividual* is sometimes a particle of, and sometimes not – we can find a kind of temporary class unity in a climate march, as fellows

raging against the industrial machine and pollution and so on, perhaps, but this unity dissipates as soon as the precarity resumes.

After the climate march, everyone is immediately subjected to precarity again, as some have to rush back to their children, some have to rush back to work, and some don't have to rush at all. A dark thought that occupies the minds of many is that precarity and individualism seem to create a situation where you cannot ever be sure that your goals or desires are aligned with those around you – are you really both looking for the same thing? While this is an over exaggeration: the nu-school blockchain nano-fascists also want to save the planet, but they could not care less about poverty in the Global South. People you rave with on the dance floor may, the entire time, be going home to write conspiracy theories about China, or log into Discord servers rife with sexism or homophobia – the temporary alignment, the transient becoming of the body without organs will dissipate. If class was once an identifiable Body-Without-Organs, manually held in some fixed state by intelligent machines, it has since dissipated. We are once again just random, discarded and useless organs that appear to do nothing useful compared to their obvious and meretricious function as part of a larger assemblage now departed. The idea of being afraid to turn our critical eye upon ourselves is precisely because that process of examination seems to force the socio-economic body-without-organs to collapse; the illusion is dispelled, and we are rightfully afraid to experience or witness the collapse of the illusion of communality that drives our hopes or comforts us.

The solution however, might be to turn this on its head, attempting to turn negative to positive in a twisted way, much alike the accelerationists who see the only way to deal with Capitalism is to let it run wild and inevitably collapse itself. What if we all took the plunge and dared to *look*, to *judge*, to say 'yes, but what is their pay check? what privileges do they have? where did the idea really come from? how much free time do they have and why? We could all holds hands and confess, to become entirely transparent. In a very accelerationist way, the act of everyone revealing all of their cards at once would probably cause civilisation to collapse almost immediately. It would be the anti-rapture, a moment where all sins are returned to those who commit them. Imagine if the hidden connections were revealed, the alliances, the agreements between parties, if the confidential information would be leaked. I don't think we would ever look at art the same way, when it would be fully transparent how the idea was formed, how the labour was organised, how the work was funded. While this may seem to invoke some nightmarish image, it could also be understood as an anarchistic utopia, a truly open network where absolutely nothing is kept hidden or enclosed, a situation where trust could actually thrive; a hive mind where each mind is a node in the network and information flows so quickly that it can approach negative time. It does suggest that the extent to which one can feel at home in a community is the extent to which they trust that, should the information ever be leaked, they will have made the right decision about who to stand beside.

What seems to be suggested in the last paragraph is that we do as Diogenes did, and to take a lantern to the rave, to hold it in the faces of our peers and look deeply into their eyes, in that mythological doomed search for an honest man. Yet, in a slightly less idealised and stylised

cynical image, we could imagine this notion of transparency in a more utopian sense. For the sake of staying with the context of Diogenes now, take as an example some passages in Xenophon where Antisthenes and his teacher Socrates are dining as guests at the table of a wealthy man, Callias. In response to the host, Antisthenes curiously suggests that he is also proud of his wealth, to which Socrates answers along the lines of "how can you be proud of your wealth when you have such limited means?". Rather than goading his student for a bad answer, it can be inferred from the social dynamics of the conversation (Callias as the wealthy host asking Socrates and Antisthenes to justify their position at the table) that Socrates recognises that Antisthenes is using a different idea of Wealth, and by having knowledge of Antisthenes' more humble background, is able to set up his student to be able to make a more interesting and virtuous oration in a way that is less likely to be perceived as hostile by the host. Antisthenes was then able to explain his idea of true Wealth, by being able to frame it as an answer to Socrates' precisely positioned question. The transparency of knowing Antisthenes' socio-economic position allowed Socrates to set up Antisthenes in the best way possible. How could someone know how to help another, if the other does not tell the "truth" of a situation (see: every episode of House M.D. ever made).

There is a great magic in having nothing to hide, and the immensity of this magic is embodied in the meeting of Diogenes, student of Antisthenes, and Alexander the Great. It's a well known story, that Alexander sought out Diogenes and found him asleep on a roadside somewhere in Northern Greece or Galicia or whatever, and he asked what he could do for Diogenes, as he was clearly a fan. Diogenes replied "you could move as you are blocking my sun". To insult a king and not face immediate punishment seems unlikely, yet the story goes that his perspective and precision of words was enough to produce the opposite result, and Alexander, in place of killing him, gives him a great honour by stating that if he were not Alexander, he would be Diogenes. This is the idyllic cynical perspective, to make all illness, stupidity, misfortune, and sin transparent and clear to all, but in a way that is so clearly intended with love and a sincere focus on symbiotic growth that not even an insecure egomaniacal Emperor can misread it as an attack.

Diogenes was a student of Antisthenes, just as Antisthenes was a student of Socrates, Diogenes the Cynic follows Antisthenes' adaptation of Socrates' teachings. To have studied under Socrates is to be intimately in touch with ways of determining or critiquing virtue and the Good, and here lies something important. A queer cynic would not see Diogenes' habit of holding a lantern to people's faces as invasive or judgemental, rather a symbolic performance of an important point that prevails today: we all have terrible habits taught to us and reinforced by Capitalism. We do, sincerely, cover truth for personal gain, so Diogenes' question remains a potent symbolic image: which of us could truly say Diogenes would see the Good in our eyes? Yet, one thing a queer cynic must grapple with is that there is a stigma against cynicism, in the sense of it tending to dissolve social formations as we saw with class, and in the sense of it being "too pessimistic" or perhaps guilty of "manifesting negative futures by focusing only on the bad parts of things". Despite popular assumption, cynicism is ultimately positive at its core, it is a philosophical tradition that is rooted in Socrates' search for the highest of virtues, it is such a search for the highest of values that takes into account Antisthenes' critique of Wealth, Pleasure and Wisdom.

In taking into account Antisthenes' position, Diogenes sets out in search of this newly conceptualised virtue and subsequently virtuous living. Even Socrates eludes to this in previous texts, and one astonishing quote comes to mind:

"I remember now having heard long ago in a dream, or perhaps when I was awake, some talk about pleasure and wisdom to the effect that neither of the two is the good, but some third other thing, different from them and better than both".

Following antisthenes' deconstruction of Wealth and satisfaction, Diogenes embarked on a path towards this third thing that was neither pleasure nor wisdom, but something different from them and better than both. To be becoming-cynical is not to wish for a miserable future, neither is it to manifest one incidentally, but it is the opposite, to use cynicism in its socrato-antistheneto-diogenetic form as a way of detaching the self from being caught in one specific pursuit, of either wisdom or pleasure (or power, or whatever), but to always be drifting off course towards something beyond any fixed, identifiable desire. Instead of seeing the dissolution of class unity as necessarily tragic, we could refigure this dissolution as positive, in that it may bring about a unified sense of yearning for something beyond what we typically and habitually accept as the Good. We can each become nomads of virtue, like Diogenes, unified in nothing but a mutual care for each others own potential becoming and each others dignity.

Foto: Sylvia John

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